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SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - CORRECTING PARAGRAPH NUMBERS

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SUBJECT: UMRANIYE ROUND-UP TARGETS DEEP STATE

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Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. The January 22 police round-up of scores of people in Istanbul and other cities, related to the discovery of a weapons cache in Istanbul's Umranie district last June, may be a battle in the war to fight the "deep state" in Turkey. The "deep state" is a vague, ill-defined network of like-minded people (including former military personnel and government officials) with ties to Turkey's ultra-nationalists that purports to provide an "alternative" to state power. Allegedly, this extra-legal grouping works to influence and deliver public support behind actions by real state actors, often the military. Some, such as former Prime Minister and President Suleyman Demirel, voice support for this power center. Current PM Erdogan apparently opposes it and is looking for ways to subvert if not destroy it. There is speculation the contemporary deep state has overlap affiliation with popularly termed Operation Gladio, a Cold War "stay behind" network organized to resist possible Soviet occupation. Successful prosecution of a deep state network would strike a blow against nationalist impunity and demonstrate a strong commitment to rule of law. Despite apparent support for this investigation at the highest levels of the political leadership, prosecution can only be successful with the cooperation of Turkey's arch-nationalist judiciary. End summary.

UMRANIYE RAIDS

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12. (C) In pre-dawn raids on the morning of Tuesday, January 22, police in Istanbul and at least four other cities took suspects into custody under suspicion of belonging to what Istanbul prosecutor Zekeriya Oz labeled a terrorist organization. Press report police monitored Ergenekon (ultra-nationalist club) members, actions and telephone conversations for 8 months as part of an investigation of a stockpile of explosives and ammunition found June 12, 2007, in Umranie, a middle class district on the Asian side of Istanbul. Istanbul-based TESEV Foreign Policy Director Mensur Akgun believes there is an Ergenekon link to clandestine "stay behind" networks (popularly referred to as Operation Gladio after the Italian version) set up in NATO countries to resist potential Soviet occupation. Akgun says Ergenekon is part of the "Deep State" apparatus in Turkey and believes Prime Minister Erdogan forced the military to

acquiesce to police exposure and prosecution of the group.

**¶3.** (U) According to police, the Istanbul raids were part of an organized counterterrorism effort carried out in Istanbul, Adana, Izmir, Duzce, and Malatya. Thus far, 60 suspects have been detained from nationalist groups called Ergenekon, Atabayler, Sauna, and Umraniye. During initial raids in June/July 2007, police discovered a hit list including pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) deputies Ahmet Turk and Sebahat Tuncel, Diyarbakir mayor Osman Baydemir, former MP Leyla Zana, Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk, and Zaman daily journalist Fehmi Koru. DTP politicians on the list reportedly refused a 24-hour police guard offered them. Also uncovered in the raid were diagrams and action plans said to lay out the foundations for a coup planned for 2009. Press speculation implicates Ergenekon in virtually every killing with political significance over the past several years, including the Hrant Dink murder, the 2006 Council of State (Danistay) shooting which killed one judge, the bombing of the Cumhuriyet newspaper building in Istanbul, and the 2006 murder of an Italian priest, among others. Prior to the raids on January 22, 15 people had been arrested in connection with the Umraniye weapons cache. They were charged with establishing and running an armed terrorist organization, conspiring to encourage military members to disobey orders, acquiring information on state security, and being in possession of explosives.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF A COMPLICATED SUBJECT

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**¶4.** (C) Referring to the antecedents of Ergenekon, Mensur Akgun says nationalist elements, traceable to Ottoman days, were responsible for incidents including the Istanbul riots of September 6-7, 1955, targeting the Greek minority. Then-PM Bulent Ecevit complained in 1974 of a "counter guerrilla" force operating outside the Turkish military chain of command. Akgun also claimed former PM Tansu Ciller and former President Suleyman Demirel requested and received NSC

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approval for a "deep state" mechanism in the 1990s. Forces established in the 1950s as sleeper agents, once directed by the intelligence community, have come to feel immune from prosecution and are no longer controllable, Akgun claimed. Ergenekon has overlap with this group. Akgun also professed that deep state elements have taken part in efforts to eliminate the PKK, citing the Semdinli incident. The November 9, 2005, bombing of a bookstore in Semdinli killed one and injured several in Turkey's southeastern province of Hakkari. Two suspects were found to be members of the security forces. Efforts by Prosecutor Ferhat Sarikaya to pinpoint ultimate responsibility for the attack resulted in his being fired by the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (Ref A).

**¶5.** (C) Akgun posits arrests on January 22 were facilitated by followers of Fethullah Gulen (once a deep state target) who have established themselves in the regular police and police intelligence cadres. Akgun cited the Prime Minister's comment, "the state is working," as evidence he had forced agreement with Turkey's military to make the Umraniye investigations public. Those found guilty would be prosecuted, said Akun. Mindful of truncated investigations into Sedinli, Susurluk (Ref B) and other scandals, Akgun made an appeal for the USG to reveal any information it has that would corroborate evidence of wrongdoing by the suspects.

**¶6.** (C) The judiciary, Akgun said, could prove a stumbling block to justice. He lamented that though not necessarily corrupt, Turkey's judiciary had large numbers of "illiberal" judges, more focused on protecting the state from the individual than in promoting individual rights, and who firmly believe any means should be used to protect the state. Insofar as the deep state's purported intentions are to

protect the state (as that group defines it), they may be able to find common cause with some in the legal system who could shield them from the full brunt of prosecution. Akgun expects the accused would mount a strong defense but added that there are now many factors at work to thwart the extra-legal group. Akgun -- and many respected media commentators -- said success would have far-reaching, positive implications for the rule of law and democracy in Turkey.

A ROGUE'S GALLERY FRAMES THE PLOT

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¶ 7. (U) Central to the cast of characters detained in the Umraniye raids is retired Major General Veli Kucuk, reputed to be a leader in the Ergenekon organization. Following the 1996 Susurluk incident, the Office of the Chief of the General Staff reportedly blocked charges from being filed against Kucuk (then active duty) and he refused to give a deposition to the parliamentary investigation. Kucuk sued Erdal Dogan (attorney for the Dink family) after Dogan told prosecutors that Kucuk could be involved in Dink's murder. Kucuk attended hearings for Dink's Article 301 case, filed by ultra-nationalist lawyer Kemal Kerencsiz who was also detained on January 22. Kerencsiz filed 301 cases against Orhan Pamuk and Elif Shafak as well.

¶ 8. (U) Also among the detained is Oktay Yildirim, a retired noncommissioned officer reputed to have made threatening phone calls to Prosecutor Zekeriya Oz. Two people arrested during the June 2007 raid on the house in Umraniye indicated Yildirim provided the weapons. Yildirim claims he found the weapons at a dump behind a military barracks in Hasdal on Istanbul's European side.

DEMIREL ON THE DEEP STATE

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¶ 9. (U) Interviewed on CNN-Turk on April 17, 2005, former President Demirel said, "The deep state is the state itself. It is the military. The military that established the state always fears the collapse of the state. The people sometimes misuse the rights provided.... The deep state is not active as long as the state is not brought to the verge of collapse. They are not a separate state, but when they intervene in the administration of the state, they become the deep state."

¶ 10. (C) Comment. The deep state is shady, vague and ill-defined. Events like the 1955 Istanbul riots, Susurluk and Semdinli, the Dink 301 trial and subsequent assassinations have long haunted public life. Weak rule of law and the impunity with which privileged operators have long been able to subvert Turkey's legal system have created an environment in which rumors of the deep state's existence

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have been enough to give the concept a life of its own. Fear of the deep state's omnipotence combined with an unshakable belief that it exists, imparts much of its power. If Akgun's take is correct, PM Erdogan has the evidence he needs to expose and close down or seriously damage a widely rumored "deep state" apparatus that works outside the rule of law, often in the service of ultra-nationalist causes. However, prosecution will only be successful with the cooperation of Turkey's deeply conservative judiciary. That will be the test; passing it will have positive implications for strengthening and extending democracy and rule of law in Turkey. End comment.

WIENER